論　著

The Anti-footbinding Movement in Late Ch'ing China : Indigenous Development and Western Influence

Chia-lin Pao Tao*

Before the introduction of western ideas and customs to China in the late imperial era, footbinding was prevalent among the majority of Han Chinese women. This Chinese preference for small feet can be traced back to ancient times, although efforts to determine the precise origins of footbinding have been inconclusive. It may have originated with palace dancers, gradually spread to entertainers and prostitutes, to the leisured women of well-to-do families in the cities, and then to the general populace. In any event, footbinding became popular in urban areas around the tenth century. Occasionally, voices were raised against the custom, but like the tears and laments of young girls undergoing the

* Associate Professor, University of Arizona

近代中國婦女史研究　第 2 期（ 1994 年 6 月）
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agonies of the footbinding process for the first time, those voices were but lonely cries in the wilderness.

The popularity of this peculiar custom reached its peak in the Ch'ing dynasty (1644-1911), although a few minority ethnic groups such as the Hakkas, Manchus, Tibetans, and Mongols did not adopt the practice. (Virginia Chui-tin Chau, 10-11) In fact, the Manchu rulers attempted to prohibit footbinding in China as early as 1645, but they failed. The belief that tiny, deformed feet were a mark of beauty, gentility, and sexual desirability remained unchallenged. In Honan, Hopei, and Shansi provinces, beauty pageants were held annually, where the tiny-footed contestants were judged and graded by the public. (Nagao Ryuzo, 846-47)

Footbinding in China has become an important subject in the cross-cultural examination of the oppression of women. Because small feet were sexually appealing to the Chinese male in pre-modern China, Chinese women, like women all over the world, sought to conform to these male-defined standards of beauty. Footbinding, although much more painful, was in this sense similar to the wearing of corsets and high heels, the plucking of eyebrows, having one's breasts enlarged with silicone implants, or having one's face lifted.

Andrea Dworkin, a feminist writer, has called footbinding "a political institution which reflected and perpetuated the sociological and psychological inferiority of women," and resulted in "the oppression of women based on totalitarian standards of beauty and a rampant sexual fascism." For ten centuries this cultural obsession cast many millions of women in the role of sexual objects and breeders. Footbinding did not emphasize the differences between men and women - - it created them, and they were then perpetuated in the name of morality. (Dworkin, 96-104) The physical impairment of female mobility in this manner was thought to ensure chastity, fidelity, the legitimacy of children, and a peaceful life for

all. Bernard Rudofsky, a social critic, has theorized that men find deep sexual excitement in the hobbling of women. (Brownmiller, 1984, 184-185) It was also believed that small feet increased the erotic pleasures of men in the act of lovemaking. (Levy, 112-71) But on the other hand, most Chinese women had internalized this man-made beauty standard. Even Pearl Buck in her childhood days in China, while receiving instructions alongside her Chinese friends from their grandmothers, had wondered whether she should have her feet bound if she was to get a good husband! (Croll, 1989, 218-19)

However, with the arrival of Western missionaries, merchants and diplomats in the 1840s and a growing awareness among the Chinese of foreign customs and practices, footbinding began to be criticized as a backward custom. Concerned by China's repeated defeats at the hands of the Western powers and Japan in the late nineteenth century, Chinese intellectuals endeavored to trace the roots of China's weakness. Their efforts continued over the next sixty years. In time, most intellectuals came to believe that if China were to survive in the modern world, change was necessary and inevitable. Imbued with a sense of urgency, they often identified footbinding as a major contributor to China's plight, with opium-smoking a close second. To strengthen the nation, they argued, it was imperative to abolish a custom that adversely affected half of China's population. Sentiment to abolish footbinding steadily gained adherents until the failure of the Reform Movement of 1898. There followed a period when the movement had its ups and downs. The rank of abolitionists swelled with reformers and revolutionaries, conservatives and liberals, scholars and officials, males and females, and Western missionaries and diplomats. Abundant literature in the form of essays, poems, songs, stories, novels, cartoons, pictures, advertisements, posters, and edicts supplied the Chinese with persuasive arguments to abolish the custom.

Indeed, the movement ultimately proved successful. Tiny feet, formerly considered a mark of feminine beauty, suddenly became a shameful symbol of backwardness. Newspapers condemned the appearance of tiny-footed women at international exhibitions, blaming the Taiwanese for sending ladies with bound feet to serve tea in Taiwan Hall during the 1903 exhibition in Japan. A reporter who saw them felt his "hair standing on end and a chill in his bones." (*Tung-fang tsa-chih*, no.5) In 1904, Chinese students in America addressed a letter to the Manchurian prince in charge of the St. Louis exhibition, protesting the employment of two Chinese women with bound feet as waitresses. In China, the native press thundered, "Who is so shameless as to exhibit those ugly things in a place to which a thousand nations on earth pay their attention?" (*Tung-fang tsa-chih*, nos. 5, 6, & 7)

By the turn of the century, footbinding was clearly in decline. Mrs. Archibald Little, wife of a British merchant and an activist in the anti-footbinding movement, observed in 1900 that in the families of the intellectuals, the custom had completely disappeared. (Li Yu-ning and Chang Yü-fa, eds., 1975, 1:515-18) Another study done in Tinghsien near Peking in 1929 further documented a steady decline in the custom: 99.2% of the women born before 1890, 59.7% of those born between 1905 and 1909, and only 19.5% of those born between 1910 and 1914 had bound feet. Not even one case of bound feet was found among youngsters born after 1919. (Druker, 199) When Ch'en Tung-yuan wrote the *Chung-kuo fu-nü sheng-huo shih* (A History of Chinese Women's Lives) in the 1920s, he remarked, "In the past the girls with natural feet would find it impossible to marry, just like the situation today where nobody wants girls with bound feet." (Ch'en Tung-yuan, 317) However, research conducted in a Yunnan town in the early 1940s revealed that all women above the age of thirty had been subjected to this cruel practice.

Indigenous Opposition to Footbinding Before the Mid-Nineteenth Century

Before the opposition movement started, voices of protest were occasionally raised against footbinding. As mentioned earlier, the alien Manchu rulers were known for their opposition to footbinding. Even before the Manchus came to rule in China, an edict of 1638 prohibited Manchu women to imitate the Han Chinese in binding their feet, with severe penalty for violators. After the Manchus took control of China, the edict of 1645 extended the prohibition to include the Chinese. K'ang-hsi Emperor reinforced the prohibition in 1664; for all girls born after 1662 with bound feet, their fathers should be punished with beating. If the father had an official rank, the punishment should be administered by the Board of Personnel or Board of National Defense; if the father were a commoner or soldier, he should be punished with forty slashes and sent into exile.

In fact, the Manchu government's edicts prohibiting footbinding but lacking serious enforcement in China might have had the adverse effect of actually promoting footbinding among the Chinese. The Manchu rulers had ordered all Chinese men to shave their foreheads and braid their hair in the Manchu-style queue or face execution by beheading. The Chinese understood the message: "If you want to save your hair, you cannot save your head; if you want to save your head, you cannot save your hair." The attempt to ban footbinding, however, was not backed by such extreme pressure for the Chinese. In response to a perceived threat to Chinese culture from their alien overlords, the Han Chinese may have come to regard small feet as a symbol of cultural and national identity, thus causing them to adhere even more resolutely to the custom. Because the ban on footbinding was so widely ignored, the decree was eventually rescinded in 1667. Attempts by the government in 1847 to reimpose the ban proved

equally frustrating. Some Manchus who had learned to admire tiny feet went so far as to design women's footwear equipped with small white supports to give the illusion of tiny feet.

Individuals, both men and women, sometimes publicly voiced their opposition to the custom. One incident during the late eighteenth century involved a woman with natural feet. A man from Hangchow by the name of Chao Chun-t'ai wanted to buy a concubine through a go-between in Soochow. The go-between recommended a beautiful and accomplished poetess with natural feet. Chao disliked the natural feet but requested that she compose a poem about them. In reply she wrote:

> Three-inch bowed shoes were non-existent in ages before,
> And the Great Kuanyin had two bare feet for one to adore.
> I don't know when this custom began;
> It must have been started by a despicable man. (*Yuan Mei ch'uan-chi*, 3:111; Levy, 68)

Yuan Mei (1716-98), a famous poet, on learning of this incident, wrote to Chao, "If a woman has a three-inch bowed foot but a short neck and thick waist, how can she ever give a light appearance when walking, as if she were skimming over the waves?" (Levy, 69)

A famous opponent of footbinding was Li Ju-chen (c. 1763-1830), author of the popular novel of fantasy, the *Ching-hua yuan* (Flowers in the Mirror), which satirized the practice through a reversal of conventional gender roles in a fictional account of a visit to the so-called Country of Women. (Li, 107-27) In this instance, it is the man who has to please his female masters and submit himself to the pains of having his ears pierced and his feet broken and bound. (Pao, ed., 1979, 223-25) In due course, his feet "lost much of their original shape. Blood and flesh were squeezed into a pulp and then little remained of his feet but dry bones and skin, shrunk, indeed, to a dainty size... Merchant Lin assumed, at last,

a not unappealing appearance." (Li, 113) Very few men in the Ch'ing dynasty "could have read of the travails of the merchant Lin without at least a shudder of sympathy for their pain-racked female contemporaries." (Spence, 146)

Ch'ien Yung (1759-1844), a contemporary of Li, citing the *Chuang-tze*, argued that footbinding was contrary to nature and might lead to the extinction of the nation, as evidenced in the fall of the Southern T'ang, Sung, Chin, Yuan and Ming dynasties:

> In ancient times, there were both male *ting* and female *ting* . Once footbinding was practiced this was lost. Let's consider the following: In the Southern T'ang footbinding was practiced and the Sung, lacking the custom, took it over. There were those who practiced footbinding in the Sung and Chin, and the Yuan, who lacked the practice, took it over. After Yuan, the people adopted the custom and Ming Tai-tsu from North of Yangtze took over the empire. During Ming times all palace women had bound feet; this dynasty [the Ch'ing], lacking the practice of footbinding, took the empire over and may last ten thousand years. (*Lü-yüan ts'ung-hua*, 631, quoted in Lin Wei-hung, 143)

Yet another critic, Yü Cheng-hsieh (1775-1840), regarded footbinding as the cause for women's bad health. After examining the origin and history of footbinding, Yü said:

> In ancient days we had compulsory labour for both men and women, but with their feet bound, women are no longer fit for government labour. And when the female sex is weakened, then the harmony which comes from the complementary male and female principles will be imperfect. Moreover, the bow-shoes used in footbinding originated with ballet girls, and when you lower the position of women, by implication you lower the position of men also. The reason why

women are not willing to give up this custom is because they are not aware that in ancient times there were big beautiful shoes for unbound feet worn by the aristocrats. As they cannot be convinced by reasoning alone, I have therefore gone to the trouble of making this point clear to them. (Yü Cheng-hsieh, *chüan* 13:497-504; Lin Yutang, 133)

An eminent poet Kung Tzu-chen (1792-1841) suggested that women should be encouraged to preserve their natural feet. He seemed to prefer large feet because they looked "like an immortal's." (Levy, 69) It should be pointed out that all of these scholars voiced their opposition to footbinding before the advent of Western influence in the nineteenth century.

One leader who initiated his own anti-footbinding movement -- though not without Western influence -- was Hung Hsiu-ch'uan (1814-64), the Heavenly King of the T'aiping T'ien-kuo (1850-64). He was the leader of a massive uprising that devastated South and Central China over a period of fourteen years. This movement brought many changes to the area under its control. When the Taipings were in Kiangsu, footbinding was prohibited, and women were ordered to unbind their feet under penalty of death. This drastic measure was undertaken less for humanitarian reasons than for reasons of increasing women's productivity in civil and military operations. Hung and many of his comrades were of Hakka origin. Used to a hard life of farming in mountainous terrain, the Hakka women were not subjected to the practice of footbinding, and this fact might have contributed to their opposition to the practice.

The Role of Westerners and Western Missionaries in the Movement

Western Protestant missionaries contributed substantially toward the anti-footbinding trend, although it was not the official policy of the Churches to support the movement. In 1874 John Macgowan of the London Mission gathered about sixty Chinese Christian women in a church in Amoy to discuss footbinding. They criticized the crippling effect of the custom, and one of them criticized the ambivalent attitude of the Christian church toward the practice. For fear of angering the gentry and the populace, the church was reluctant to deal with this problem. (John Macgowan, 1913, 59) The Catholic church in China maintained an even more detached attitude. Nevertheless, scattered and localized efforts against footbinding were sponsored and supported by individual missionaries and other Westerners.

In the 1890s, missionary publications such as Young J. Allen's *Wan-kuo kung-pao* (*The Globe Magazine*; hereafter cited as *WKKP*) supplied the Chinese with valuable information and inspiration for the movement. These publications attacked the custom in a variety of ways. It was argued that the cruelty involved in the custom was un-Christian, and Chinese converts were therefore discouraged from the practice. Later only girls with unbound feet were admitted to Christian boarding schools. Missionaries emphasized that the custom violated the teachings of the Bible. Moreover, it was contended that it was contemptuous of God's authority.

> God created humans with feet the same for men and women... To bind tightly the good feet of women to make the feet tiny is to fault God for making women's feet imperfectly. To deform them in order to make them beautiful is to say that man's own wisdom surpasses that of God. The presumptuousness of this practice is too terrible to contemplate. (*WKKP*, March 1893, 10a)

Although this particular argument might have been effective within the

small population of Chinese Christian converts, it might not have been so among the general population.

Many Western missionaries, diplomats, lawyers, women, and doctors residing in China actively involved themselves in the movement. In 1895, ten Western women of different nationalities organized a Natural Foot Society in Shanghai, which had the aim of convincing Chinese women to unbind their feet. Alicia Little (Mrs. Archibald Little; d. 1926), wife of a British merchant, sought to convince them to give up footbinding so that they would become strong and thereby better able to serve their country. (*WKKP*, Dec., 1899) She intended to make the Society a non-denominational and an umbrella organization to coordinate the anti-footbinding efforts. She wanted to separate the Christian missions from the anti-footbinding cause, and therefore she never held meetings in church properties. She made every effort to avoid making natural-footed women targets of anti-foreign or anti-missionary riots.

Alicia Little wanted to work with the wealthy and the powerful to abolish the custom; the Christian missions were usually associated with the poor. She called on the dignitaries and wrote to the newspapers. She managed to have an interview with Li Hung-chang, a high official, seeking his support for the cause. Li preferred to talk about her husband's pioneering trips on the Yangtze River. Mrs. Little then asked Li to write a few words on her fan to acknowledge the importance of the anti-footbinding movement, which he did. Later Mrs. Little frequently showed the fan in public meetings. Her group even drew up a petition to abolish footbinding, to which most "foreign ladies in the Far East added their names." The petition, however, failed to reach the imperial palace.

The international Natural Foot Society functioned until 1908, when it was turned over to a group of Chinese women. (*WKKP*, Dec., 1908) One scholar concluded that "if missionary work was chiefly responsible

for the achievement of the anti-footbinding movement in the 1890s and 1900s, the *Tien tsu hui* (Natural Foot Society) was the center around which all the anti-footbinding efforts worked." (Chau, p.62) Furthermore, the financial support for this organization initially came from Western sources. For example, Alicia Little raised funds in addition to being interviewed in the British newspapers and giving speeches during her visits to England in 1898 and 1899. (Croll, p. 56)

Chinese Marxist historians regarded the efforts of Western missionaries concerning women's issues to have been beneficial, with positive results in late nineteenth-century China. They claimed, however, that it was "a joke of history." Instead of successfully preaching the gospel, the missionaries, in Lenin's words, "walked into the wrong room." (Lü and Cheng, 33-37)

While Western missionaries and other Westerners played an important role in the anti-footbinding movement, the Chinese themselves may have contributed even more. Inoue Kobai, a Japanese scholar of Chinese customs, considers the abolition of footbinding in China to have been a result of the revolutionary movement rather than that of the efforts of Western missionaries. (Inoue Kobai, 3:414-25) Even Alicia Little pointed out that it was the habit of foreign residents to attribute much more importance to their own activities than Chinese observers and foreign analysts would necessarily allow. (Croll, 59) Still, a truly balanced assessment of the issue cannot overlook the important contributions of Western missionaries and other Westerners. Indigenous efforts and the work of the Westerners to abolish this custom were complementary. Indeed the endeavors of missionaries and other Westerners in the anti-footbinding movement found a more fertile soil than that in which was sowed their work in propagating the message of Christianity. Chinese intellectuals, for

example, already sensed the urgent need to abolish the custom.

Separate Identity of the Movement

Howard Levy has concluded that the opposition to footbinding gradually became more widespread *within* the larger movement for reform, modernization, and feminine equality in China. (Levy, 71) The evidence shows, however, that the anti-footbinding movement was in fact larger than, or different from, the movements for reform, modernization, and women's rights. It was a movement for all Chinese, regardless of gender or political affiliation. Conservatives such as Empress Dowager Tz'u-hsi, Chin Ch'un-hsuan, and Yuan Shih-k'ai all became abolitionists. The Empress Dowager Tzu-hsi, for example, issued an edict in 1902 abolishing footbinding along with other reform measures (see the section on "official sponsorship").

The anti-footbinding movement can be seen as larger than the movement for feminine equality because some intellectuals who opposed equality between men and women were also against the practice of footbinding. Cheng Kuan-ying (1842-1923) provides one example. He believed that a woman's place was in the home, and women should aim to be good wives and mothers, but he worked feverishly for the emancipation of their feet. He pointed out the cruelty of the custom and its harmful effects on women's bodies and noted that it also prevented women from engaging comfortably in household work. Furthermore, in case of natural disasters or war, women with bound feet must simply await death, being unable to flee. (Cheng Kuan-yin, 263-9)

Chang Chih-tung (1837-1909) believed equality between men and women was an impracticable ideal, and firmly upheld the traditional *san*

kang, the three bonds. Nevertheless, he played a key role in the founding of an anti-footbinding society in Hupei in 1897 and contributed an eloquent essay in support of the organization. (Mai, ed., 17:9-10) His reasons seemed to be at least as much economic as humanitarian. He sympathized with the lot of tiny-footed female workers in textile factories, for they could neither move around comfortably nor work long hours. He maintained that footbinding crippled half of China's population, and that it harmed women's health and productivity and limited their ability. This not only hurt the woman herself, he argued, but also her children, her husband, and her country. (Shen Yün-lung, ed., *Chang Wen-hsiang-kung*, 13)

The Arguments of Some Influential Chinese Scholars

Yen Fu (1853-1921), the great 19th-century translator who introduced Social Darwinism to China, publicly opposed footbinding. Not surprisingly, he based his arguments on the notion of survival of the fittest: "Only healthy mothers can bear healthy babies; if our babies are born healthy, then our race can be improved." He went on to write,

> It is unwise to consider bound feet beautiful. The Chinese rites and customs which have harmed people's strength and left the Chinese weak are too numerous to mention; they range from big issues such as the legal system and scholarship to minor problems such as food and habitat. The most deeply-rooted, most harmful, and most conspicuous of these customs are opium-smoking and footbinding... We should recognize that the reasons our race has become increasingly weak, our country increasingly poor, our soldiers increasingly corrupt, are due to these customs. If we do not deal with opium-smoking and

footbinding as soon as possible, reform theories will be only empty words. (Yen Fu, 1:55)

In 1882, K'ang Yu-wei (1858-1927), famous scholar and leading reformer of the late Ch'ing period, planned to establish an anti-footbinding society in Canton. Although it failed to materialize, K'ang claimed that his idea marked the beginning of anti-footbinding societies established by Chinese natives. K'ang Kuang-jen, the younger brother of K'ang Yu-wei, succeeded in organizing such a society in 1894. (Shen Yün-lung, ed., *Chin-tai chung-kuo*, 11:13; Li and Chang, eds., 1981, 193) K'ang Yu-wei consistently fought for the abolition of footbinding and made it an important measure in his reform program. In 1898, he memorialized the throne, arguing that:

> To cut off the feet was an ancient way of punishing criminals... What crime have women committed that they should invariably suffer this [same] punishment? No other country has this custom, nor would our sages allow the practice. With the flow of blood blocked, odors become unpleasant, and foot disease is rampant, women give birth to weak descendants. The younger generation are to become citizens in the future and their weaknesses will be transferred from one generation to another. [Impaired in this fashion], How can they fight in the military forces?...
>
> Politically and legally the government has imposed this punishment on the innocent; parents who love their daughters do harm to their lovingness by forced footbinding; the practice twists the bones, renders the feet useless and causes disease; militarily, it perpetuates weak descendants; and judged from an aesthetic standpoint, it makes China a laughing stock among nations. Who can stand this any longer?... I hereby plead with Your Majesty to forbid footbinding. Those who have already bound their feet should loosen them. Those who do

> not obey should forfeit their husbands' and sons' right to be honored. Those whose husbands are not officials should pay a fine of a specified amount. If any girl below [the age of] twelve has bound feet, her parents should be heavily punished. (Mai, ed., *Wu-hsü tsou-kao*, 43-45)

This proposal became the basis for an imperial edict banning footbinding in 1898. Although the 1898 reforms were abrogated by Empress Dowager Tz'u-hsi, she later saw fit to reinstate some of them, including the ban on footbinding.

K'ang Yu-wei insisted that his daughters not be subjected to the torture of bound feet, and these girls were later to become staunch advocates of the cause. One of them, K'ang T'ung-pi, learned English and traveled to India and America. According to one newspaper account, she lectured at the Reform Society of Seattle in 1903, where she stated in eloquent terms her hopes for the future of her people. (*Kuo-min jih-jih pao*, November 23, 1903) Another daughter, K'ang T'ung-wei, wrote about women's problems and called for the establishment of girls' schools to enlighten and inspire the younger generation since the anti-footbinding societies were inadequate to the needs of the situation. (Li and Chang, 2:562-6)

Liang Ch'i-ch'ao (1873-1929), K'ang Yu-wei's brilliant student and a popular and influential publicist in late imperial times, elaborated on the slogans "reform for self-strengthening" and "footbinding could make a nation extinct." He wrote, "Lack of education for women has contributed to our nation's weakness. If we do not change the custom of footbinding, education for women can never be established." (Liang, *Yin-ping-shih*, 1:44) Liang's essays were eloquent and persuasive and usually reached a large audience. In an essay opposing the practice of footbinding, he first pointed out that mutilation of the body was a severe punishment for

crimes:

> The eyes, ears, nose, hands, and feet come from Heaven and our parents. If one is incomplete or mutilated, we call this being lamed and say that Heaven has harmed the people. The ancient kings, in determining punishments, cut off noses, ears, and legs in order to punish evildoers and awe others into submission. Benevolent persons sometimes criticized these sovereigns for having damaged Heaven by injuring mankind in this way. (*Hsin-min ts'ung-pao*, 1896; Levy, 81)

Thus Liang argued that the practice of footbinding was punishment and resulted from the inequality and weakness of women's status, similarly to the leveling of women's heads in Africa and India, and the pressing of wood against women's waists in Europe:

> Men and women share equally. Heaven gives them life and parents give them love, treating them equally... But the difference between strong and weak is most clearly marked in the difference between men and women. Over the vast universe and throughout the ages, political edification from the sage and virtuous was diffused like the vast seas, but not a word was said or a deed committed for the sake of women. Women were treated in one way or other: they either fulfilled a series of duties or served as playthings. They were reared like horses or dogs to satisfy the first need and adorned like flowers or birds to satisfy the second. These two methods of oppression gave rise to three types of punishment. In Africa and India they pressed a stone against a woman's head to make it level, a punishment like our tattooing; in Europe they wanted the woman to have a slender waist, and to accomplish it they punished her by pressing wood against her waist; in China the women had to have their feet bound, a punishment akin to cutting off the lower legs. These three punishments produced imperfect women throughout the world. I do not know when bound

> feet started, but the originator must have been a corrupt prince, an immoral ruler, a robber of the people, or a despicable husband.

Liang continued to describe the cruelty of footbinding:

> Alas. Good things in the world are done only with the greatest caution and hesitation, but evil things are transmitted very easily from one to another. These cruel, despicable, and frightening things spread their poisons everywhere and for countless ages. Parents force their daughters [into binding the feet], while others make this the basis for selecting their sons' brides. And a man esteems his wife for this reason. The child is punished this way when it has still not lost its first set of teeth. Her bones are broken and the flesh deteriorates, with bloody pus scattered about and injury widespread. Parents ignore her sighs, do not pity her weeping, are cold to her entreaties, and deaf to her screams. This child cannot get up for several months, even with the aid of a cane; a year later, she can only get about by being carried in a sedan chair. (*Hsin-min ts'ung-pao*, 1896; Levy, 81-82)

Liang and his friends established a headquarters for anti-footbinding societies in Shanghai and distributed a pamphlet entitled "Song to Encourage Women's Education." Liang emphasized the correlation between women's education and the abolition of footbinding. He planned to form a girls' school to which girls with bound feet would not be admitted.

Other leading reformers active in the anti-footbinding movement included such individuals as Wang T'ao (1828-97), Ho K'ai (1859-1914), Hu Li-yuan, Ch'en Ch'ih, Mai Meng-hua, Sung Shu (1862-1910), Hung Wen-chih, T'ang Ts'ai-ts'ang, and T'an Ssu-t'ung (1865-98), to list only a few. The wives and daughters of many reform advocates were also actively involved in anti-footbinding activities through lectures and writings – – the daughters of K'ang Yu-wei (K'ang T'ung-wei and K'ang T'ung-pi), as indicated above, and the wives of K'ang Kuang-jen (Huang Ching-yu), T'an

Ssu-t'ung (Li Jun), Ching Yuan-shan, Shen Tun-ho, and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao (Li Hui-hsien.) Their support of the anti-footbinding movement caused them to meet regularly and to publish the *Nü-hsüeh pao* (Newspaper for Women's Education), the first women's newspaper in Chinese history. (Lü and Cheng, 91-99)

The Arguments of Revolutionaries

Like the reformers, leaders of the revolutionary movement liked to link footbinding with the crisis of survival China was then facing. The revolutionaries seemed to be seriously involved in enlightening the general populace to save China. (Li Hsiao-ti, 17-23) In 1903, Chin I (Chin T'ien-ke, 1874-1947) sounded the *Bell for Women* (*Nu-chieh chung*), an influential pamphlet published in Shanghai, encouraging women to join the revolution. It demanded that Chinese women be emancipated from their servitude and be cleared of four evils. The first of these evils was footbinding. Chin said:

> Since ancient times, countries have collapsed through their own fault, not because of others. Now we Chinese practice opium-smoking and footbinding. Men and women are approaching extinction in separate ways. What they are doing is committing suicide and exterminating their descendants. (Chin I, 14)

Employing a natural rights argument somewhat like that of Rousseau, Chin maintained that women should treasure their naturalness as their natural rights. The fourth evil of confinement was probably meant to be associated with footbinding. Isolated from the outside world, Chinese women were ignorant and superstitious. Even if some women were able to preserve a certain dignity at home, the humiliation they suffered was

like that heaped upon criminals. Their being isolated from society was perhaps meant to ensure their morality, but really it had nothing to do with morality. Talented and virtuous girls like Pan Chao in ancient times were not confined, while isolated girls might elope on hearing a love song. Moreover, why should women alone be responsible for a bad name? Chin wrote: "If men do not treat women in a civilized way, they are restricting themselves from a civilized world." In all social activities, both sexes should be equal. Chin's voice was loud and clear: women had to take the initiative in reforming custom. (Chin I, 20-22)

> Those who are bound by old customs are the worst; those who can avoid old customs are of medium [value]; and those who can both evade old customs and also change them into new ones are the best... If we admire Columbus and Magellan, it is better for us to become Columbus and Magellan; if we respect Confucius and Jesus, it is better to become Confucius and Jesus ourselves; if we pray to Buddha and the Goddess of Mercy everyday, it is better to become Buddha and the Goddess of Mercy ourselves. (Chin I, 19-20)

The most influential feminist revolutionary of late imperial times, the poet Ch'iu Chin, employed every tool available to her in seeking to abolish footbinding and promote women's rights. In 1904, she issued a personal manifesto on the feminist movement, "To Two Hundred Million Female Citizens of China." In it, she lamented the miserable conditions Chinese women had to endure – – subjugation, footbinding, arranged marriages, and chaste widowhood – – and criticized the absurdity of these customs. She argued that the only way to achieve true emancipation was to unbind the feet, acquire an education, become independent, work, and fight for female equality. Ch'iu Chin further pointed out that women had no property rights. Since meaningful change was impossible under the autocratic Manchu government, women had no choice, she argued,

but to join the revolution. (*Pai-hua*, 2, 1904) Thus for Ch'iu Chin, the anti-footbinding movement, the feminist movement, and the anti-Manchu revolution were inseparable causes.

In the classical poem "Random Feelings: Written in Japan", she touched on the subject of footbinding with sorrow:

The sun and moon lusterless, heaven and earth grow dark;
Submerged womankind – – who will rescue them?
Barrette and bracelet pawned to travel across the sea,
Parting from kith and kin, I left my homeland.
Freeing my bound feet, I washed away the poison of a thousand years,
And, with agitated heart, awakened the souls of all the flowers.
Alas, I have only a binding cloth woven of mermaid's silk,
Half stained with blood, half with tears. (My translation in Irving Y. Lo and William Schultz, 400)

In 1907, Ch'iu founded *Chung-kuo nü-pao* (The Chinese Women's Journal) to advocate natural feet, education for women, and women's organization. Planning to awaken half of China's population, she believed "the light in her hand" would lead many living beings across troubled waters to safety. In the first issue of the journal, Ch'iu published "To My Sisters," in which her romantic heroine has occasion to describe the parasitic life of Chinese women:

> With their feet bound in a tiny form and their hair combed in glossy style, adorned with hand-made artificial flowers, dressed in embroidered silk and satin, and painted with white powder and pink rouge, all their lives they rely only on men for what they wear and eat. Softly they flatter; silently they suffer. Tears endlessly fall as they do their housework. Woman is a criminal throughout her life. She is both cow and horse half her life. I want to ask my sisters: Have

you ever in all your life enjoyed the happiness of freedom? (Wang Ts'ai-chih, 57-58)

The wife of Kao Pai-shu (Maiden name is Chin; name unknown), who founded the Foot Unbinding Society in Hangchow, lectured frequently on this theme. She emphasized that loosening bound feet was the starting point for women to become citizens of a civilized country. (*Che-kiang ch'ao*, 2:5-6) The names of the abolitionist leaders in various provinces who shared these views are too numerous to mention here. The arguments they most often advocated in support of their cause were as follows: 1) footbinding is ugly; 2) it is painful; 3) it is harmful to health; 4) it affects working ability; 5) it makes it impossible for women to flee from sources of imminent danger, such as scenes of military conflict; and 6) it makes women a burden on their husbands, their families, and the nation.

Other Arguments of the Abolitionists

Some abolitionists also sought to bring about a change in existing perceptions of what constituted feminine beauty. Mrs. Kao Pai-shu wrote that ladies with bound feet "do not look right when walking, and do not look right when standing. All we see is a shy and withdrawn woman." (*Che-kiang ch'ao*, 2:2) It was also pointed out that the famous beauties of ancient times did not have bound feet. (Li and Chang, eds., 1975, 500-501)

There was also an appeal to traditional ethics; namely, the kind and loving relationship that ideally should exist between parents and their children. It was acknowledged that a mother bound her daughter's feet in the hopes of marrying her off to a good family in the future, but the cruelty of the act, it was argued, damaged the mother-daughter relationship. The

practice gradually transformed the "kindly heart" into a "ruthless heart." (*WKKP*, 1895)

It was argued that one of the functions of footbinding was to confine women so as to preserve their chastity. Without directly attacking the double moral standard implicit in this argument, Mrs. Kao Pai-shu argued that a wise women with natural feet would still choose to preserve her chastity. (*Che-kiang chao*, 2:2) Yung Chia-hsiang, the winner of an essay contest sponsored by the Natural Foot Society, pointed out that famous wise women of times past (when footbinding was not in vogue) were chaste, thus concluding that one had nothing to do with the other. As he noted, "The prostitute with tiny feet can still travel around. How can anyone stop her?" (*WKKP*, 1898)

Examples of anti-footbinding literature from the late Ch'ing period often draw a comparison between bound and natural feet in vernacular slogans. One such piece, entitled "Ten Sighs Over Footbinding", stresses the negative aspects of the custom:

1. Why were my natural feet ruined?
2. Kuanyin is barefooted; why do I have to have bound feet?
3. You can't get anything done with bound feet, and yet footbinding takes great effort [to achieve and maintain small feet].
4. It's easy to get sick, because one's blood circulation is blocked.
5. Because of tiny feet, I can't be filial toward my own parents, and I feel apologetic to my in-laws because I can't perform laborious tasks for them.
6. I get angry to the point of illness because of pain, but my own mother won't let me loosen the bindings.
7. The tiny-footed are prone to being deceived by evil men.
8. Poor women bind their feet. There's no food in the house, but they can't go out to get firewood and the necessities of life.

9. People feel that poorly bound feet are ugly and unclean.
10. Don't make the younger generation suffer. Loosen the feet in order to cause the family to prosper.

The pamphlet "Ten Delights of Natural Feet" adopted a different approach to the subject by stressing the positive results to be gained by natural feet:

1. I can walk easily.
2. I enjoy freedom, and my parents don't worry about my foot size.
3. Things are convenient for me; Kuanyin is also large-footed.
4. [After I marry], I can visit my parents whenever I want, even though they live far away.
5. When my husband is away, I can take care of anything that occurs at home.
6. A large-footed woman is not easily deceived, and she has no problem in keeping her feet clean.
7. To eradicate the evil age of footbinding is to restore the intent of our ancient sages, who elevated natural-footedness.
8. The natural-footed woman is stronger, more patriotic, and can achieve heroic deeds.
9. The nation benefits from her vigorous spirit and devotion to study.
10. She is unhampered by bad roads and can travel freely everywhere, both in China and abroad. (Levy, 75-76)

Modern Western medical technology was also a powerful tool in advancing the cause. *T'ou-ku hsin-fa* (the new X-ray), made the differences between the bound foot and the natural one very clear, thus providing scientific evidence that the deformities of the former made physical movement painful and difficult.

It was also argued that if Confucius were alive in the late nineteenth century he would advocate the emancipation of the female feet. The

rationale was as follows: Confucius favored the correcting of all wrongs, and footbinding was manifestly wrong. The Confucian teaching that "the body, the hair, and the skin are endowed by one's parents and should not be harmed" was frequently quoted in anti-footbinding literature.

The most convincing argument against footbinding was probably that of the dangers suffered by tiny-footed women in times of emergencies and war. Many advocates of abolition joined the movement solely out of consideration for the welfare of women alone, without touching on the high-sounding principles of national survival. Lin Shu, the famous poet, essayist, and translator of Western novels, composed a trilogy entitled "The Tiny-footed Lady". Justifiably regarded as classic expressions of the anti-footbinding literature, the first part describes the agonies a young girl was compelled to endure when her feet were bound; the second depicts the suffering a tiny-footed housewife, who is chaste and hardworking, confronts during times of natural disaster; and the third relates the disgrace and death a woman who is similarly handicapped encounters in wartime, because she is unable to disguise herself as a man or flee (*Shih-wu pao*, 50:11-12; translations in Joshua A. Fogel, ed., 30-32, and Levy, 82-85) The threat posed by bandit activities and natural disasters evoked strong fears among all levels of the population. Indeed, the late Ming and the late Ch'ing were periods much troubled by banditry, rebellion, military invasion, and natural calamities.

Lo Ts'un-jung cited the rebellion of Chang Hsien-chung as an example to illustrate the disastrous consequence of footbinding. At the end of the Ming dynasty, when the forces of Chang Hsien-chung occupied Hsiang-yang, he ordered his men to cut off the hands of every man and the legs of every woman they captured. Two large mounds were made of the amputated limbs. The mound of feet was called the Peak of Golden Lotuses. No woman with lotus feet, that is to say, bound feet, was spared.

(Mai Chung-hua, ed., *Huang-chao*, 17:10) One observer mentioned that during the Nien Rebellion, which affected a large portion of central China, tiny-footed women could hardly avoid death. As a result, nine-tenths of the women in affected areas committed suicide by various means; if their feet had not been bound they might have survived. (The observer is Huang Kao-sheng. See Yü Pao-hsien, ed., 79:18b)

Chao Tseng-tze emphasized that with natural feet women could attain the virtues of loyalty and filial piety during wartime:

> A natural-footed woman, when there is urgent need, can take her mother-in-law on her back and escape; when there is an intrusion at night, she can grasp a weapon to protect herself. If a woman is practised in the martial arts, she can defend the country and bandits will not dare enter her house. She can preserve her reputation and chastity. She therefore will be capable of loyalty and filial piety. (Yü Pao-hsien, ed., 79:15a)

The Allied Expedition of 1899-1900 struck a heavy blow at Chinese women in the Peking area, providing yet another example of how helpless tiny-footed women were in times of war. When the Allied armies marched on Peking, it was reported that many women were either raped or committed suicide. In the city of Tungchow alone, the suicides were said to have amounted to more than ten thousand. (*Kiangsu*, 4:144-45) Since most of these women were tiny-footed, the abolitionists made full use of the incident in their propaganda. Of course, no one can say that if these women had had natural feet they could have escaped. However, incidents of this kind provided valuable arguments in the struggle against footbinding. Scattered evidence shows that many women loosened their bound feet for fear of immobility in times of emergency. In certain districts in Fukien, women "abolished the footbinding custom due to painful lessons of the past." (*WKKP*, 1895)

To speed the reform movement, various remedies for reducing the pain in unbinding the feet were made known to the populace. In the "Song of Unbinding the Feet," authored by Ts'ai Lü-nung (dates unknown), one prescription was put forward:

Happiness is to loosen the bound feet;
The joy is tremendous.
Please listen to my song of unbinding feet.
Use cotton to pad the toes;
And walk in a flat way.
Wash with vinegar and water;
Don't use too much binding cloth;
Cut the cloth one foot every seven days.
For one month, take good care.
Sleep barefooted at night;
Let the blood circulate smoothly.
Let go your feet
And do not fear trouble.
Happiness is to loosen the bound feet;
The joy is tremendous.
Please sing with me the song of unbinding the feet.
(*Ching-chung jih-pao*, Dec. 31, 1904)

The Anti-footbinding Societies

Organizing action groups was one means adopted by Chinese intellectuals to advance the cause of reform in the 1890s. This tactic was also adopted in the anti-footbinding movement. In fact, the success of the movement relied to a great extent on the organized efforts

and activities of anti-footbinding societies. The Chinese terms for those societies varied - - *Pu ch'an-tsu hui, Chieh ch'an-tsu hui, Pu ko-tsu hui, T'ien-tsu hui, Wei-tsu hui,* and *Fang-tsu hui.* Their full names, collected from the available sources, are indicative of their location: Amoy (1875), Kwangtung (1883 and 1894), Shanghai (1895 and 1897), Yueh-chung (1895), Lung-shan (1896), Hupei (1897), Macao (1897), T'o-ch'eng (1897), Fo-shan (1897), Ta-liang, Shun-te, Nan-hai, Hu-chou, Yueh-chou, Fuchow, Chia-ting, Hsiang-shan, Canton, T'ung-shan, Lo-chung, Hunan, Soochow, Tientsin (1898), Li-li (1904), Hangchow (1903), Wu-chang, Huai-an, Hupei (1904), Cheng-tu, Chungking, Nan-feng (1904), Honan (1907), Chen-chiang, Hsien-chou, Chiu-chiang, Hong Kong, Yen-tai, Ten-chou, Wei-hsien, Yang-chou, Tsi-nan, Wu-hsi, Ju-yang, Shang-ts'ai (1909), Pen-cheng, An-su, Wen-shui, Shun-chih, and Luan-chou (1911). (Lin Wei-hung, 1991, 155-66; Wang Erh-min, 138-40) Most of them located in the coastal areas.

Undeniably, a careful check of local gazetteers would bring to light many more. As the list clearly shows, the movement started in the coastal areas and gradually spread to central China. Moreover, these societies usually came into being in cities or urban areas. Often, groups of friends simply decided to solve the problem of finding suitable marriage partners for daughters whose feet were not bound. And because they did not seek publicity for their organizations, record of them did not appear in local gazetteers. Only the names of anti-footbinding societies with publicized rules and regulations were recorded in published sources.

The effectiveness of these societies lay in their successfully solving the marriage problems of girls with natural feet. The fact that girls with natural feet were often made the laughing stock of the community, and that their families encountered serious difficulties in marrying them off, constituted serious obstacles to the movement. As a result, the

goals of the anti-footbinding societies included promotion of natural feet and arranging marriages of the members' daughters. This two-pronged approach to the problem proved to be the most effective vehicle for change in the anti-footbinding movement. Members, mostly intellectuals, committed their sons to marriages with the natural-footed daughters of fellow members. They registered the names and ages of all their children, and that information was made available when they were ready to enter into marriage alliances. Since most members of these societies were leaders and respected members of the community, their new ways quickly attracted public attention.

It was common for these societies to adopt formal rules and regulations governing the general membership. (Li and Chang, eds.; the English version of The Rules of the Hunan Anti-footbinding Society appeared in Ebrey, ed., 1981, 245-46) When the rules and regulations were publicized, any member who violated the rules of a society was subject to punishment. The members also donated funds for such activities as preparing and distributing pamphlets, the composing of songs, the staging of public lectures, the writing of essays to spread the anti-footbinding message, and the founding of girls' schools. They often provided concrete advice on how best to unbind the feet, such as how to minimize the pain involved and how to make shoes for the released feet. (*WKKP*, Nov., 1908) In sum, they assisted women in preparing physically and psychologically for the difficult task of freeing their feet of the old restraints, and these efforts were indispensable in the success of the movement.

Some anti-footbinding societies organized regular activities for their members' daughters. For example, the Chia-ting society scheduled a party for their daughters aged five to fourteen during the first month of the year at the director's residence. Those who excelled in their general behavior, their daily tasks, and their speech were awarded prizes. (*Shih-wu pao*,

50) In 1907, a *chiao* (religion) even appeared, the "Natural Foot *chiao*," aimed at promoting natural feet with religious fervor. (Lü and Cheng, 1990, 167)

The statistical data on these anti-footbinding societies are limited; however, some idea of their popularity can be inferred from such reports as are available. An estimate of the membership of the Shanghai society in 1900, according to Archibald Little, was "more than 300,000." (*WKKP*, June 1900) More than eight hundred individuals were reported to have attended one meeting of the Natural Foot Society in Shanghai in January 1905. Another meeting in March of the same year was so crowded that those who came late could not get in. About one third of these participants were women, some of whom stepped forward to deliver speeches. In Wei-hsien, Shantung, four hundred women attended an anti-footbinding meeting; when the meeting ended, 205 women signed up to unbind their feet. In subsequent months, about one thousand women did so. In 1905, the Natural Foot Society reportedly distributed more than 100,000 copies of its pamphlets. (Lü & Cheng, 163-65)

The anti-footbinding movement, like other social causes, had its opposition. The efforts of these societies were often labelled as alien in inspiration, and their members were described as individuals who "flatter the foreign religion." Malicious stories were circulated and posters were displayed to defame the leadership of the anti-footbinding societies. Yeh Te-hui, a high official in the Board of Personnel, stated that anti-footbinding societies were created for the purpose of embezzling money. (*I-chiao ts'ung-pien*, 445) Tseng Chi-hui argued that anti-footbinding activities were intended to destroy the nation. (Lu & Cheng, 104) In one case, the sign for the anti-footbinding society was stolen. (*Ching-chung jih-pao*, January 20, 1905) In Shanghai where the movement was most vigorous, the story was circulated that the director of the local society supported

the cause because his wife made him lick her bound feet. Since *t'ien-chu* (natural foot) and *t'ien-chu* (lick the foot) are near homophones, they called him "The Director who Licks Foot." (Levy, 74)

Some Chinese scholars who had studied in the West, and were regarded as learned by their peers, continued to defend this outmoded custom. For instance, Ku Hung-ming (1857-1928), the Oxford trained professor and arch-conservative, never wavered in his opposition to the elimination of footbinding, which he considered an integral part of Chinese culture. He spoke publicly about the wonderousness of footbinding and the "supernatural exaltation" of his experience with tiny-footed women. (Levy, 140-41)

Official Sponsorship of the Movement

The anti-footbinding movement reached its peak in 1901-05, largely because of official sponsorship. Young Allen documented this fact in 1904, observing that "the flourishing of the Natural Foot Societies was due to the promotion of the enlightened high officials in China." (*WKKP*) After the signing of the Boxer Protocol, the Empress Dowager Tz'u-hsi issued an edict in 1902 abolishing footbinding, and this time many local officials took it seriously. Even some conservative officials become abolitionists. Chin Ch'un-hsuan, Governor of Szuchuan, distributed copies of the imperial edict in vernacular and wrote an essay on the subject. It was said that fifty thousand copies of his essay were circulated among scholars and officials, as well as the common people. (*Ta-kung pao*, 1903) Yuan Shih-k'ai, the Governor-general of Chihli, ordered that his daughters' feet be unbound, and then posted notices and distributed pamphlets advising against the custom. He also composed an essay in which he enumerated four evils

of footbinding – – it was harmful to the health, it impaired the education of women, it was injurious to a mother's virtue, and it crippled women in their work. (*WKKP*, 1903) Tuan Tsa, Governor-general of Kiangsu and Chekiang, supported the movement by drafting regulations for carrying out the edict, with rewards and punishments to be meted out to lower officials depending on their performance in putting the ban into practice. He also distributed several ten thousands copies of the posters in vernacular. (*Tung-fang tsa-chih*, 12:48; *Ta-kung pao*, 1909)

Official sponsorship also helped fund the publishing and distribution of anti-footbinding literature when private donations proved to be inadequate. Some Ch'ing officials made generous donations to the cause and assisted in various fundraising activities, such as selling Natural Foot Society buttons. At one anti-footbinding society meeting, a military band came to perform. (Lin Wei-hung, 1991, 176-77) In Tayeh, Hupei, the magistrate ordered village heads to parade in their villages with gongs in hands to persuade women to unbind their feet. (*Ta-kung pao*, 1903) Some district magistrates even sponsored banquets for the cause. For example, the magistrate of Lung-ch'ang, Szechuan, invited more than three hundred guests to a banquet and arranged a keynote speech on anti-footbinding. (*Ta-kung pao*, 1904) By 1904, the governors-general of eighteen provinces had issued orders to prohibiting the evil practice, leaving only the jurisdiction of Fukien – – Chekiang and Shensi – – Kansu yet to comply. (*WKKP*, 1904)

Thanks to the efforts of many different segments of the population, the anti-footbinding movement of late Ch'ing may be regarded as one of the most successful social reforms in history. It is evident that in the process popular conception of feminine beauty underwent a significant change. Tiny-footed ladies were no longer deemed beautiful and they even began to experience difficulty in finding marriage partners. However, footbinding

was not eradicated. Unlike the vestiges of the custom of opium-smoking which quickly faded from the scene, decades passed before women with bound feet were no longer to be seen.

After the Ch'ing dynasty was overthrown, it was still necessary for Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the President of the new Republic, to issue new bans on the practice in March 1912. From 1917 to 1922, Yen Hsi-shan, the warlord of Shansi province where footbinding beauty pageants were regularly held in late Ch'ing, was adamant in wiping out the practice and was successful. Other provinces such as Yunnan, Honan and Shantung also achieved significant results in early Republican period. (Lin Ch'iu-ming, 1990, 88-94)

In 1927 the Nationalist Government reinforced the prohibition of footbinding, and the emphasis was on unbinding the small feet. However, the custom persisted among Han Chinese women in the backward provinces and border regions such as Kansu, Ninghsia, Suiyuan, Chahar, Yunnan and Shensi. While the minority women all had natural feet, the enforcement among Han Chinese women seemed disappointing. (Lin Ch'iu-ming, 1990, 127-30) It was another indication that footbinding was related to national and cultural identity. Severe punishment and strict enforcement seemed necessary to deal with the problem. During the Sino-Japanese War the Ministry of Interior of the Nationalist Government stipulated that parents who bound their daughters' feet should be punished as assault and imprisoned for up to five years and pay a penalty of up to $500. (Lin Ch'iu-ming, 1990, 141)

A fair assessment of the anti-footbinding movement in late Ch'ing would show that Western missionaries and other Westerners provided the initial inspiration for this movement, as well as the model for organized anti-footbinding societies. Their efforts fell on fertile soil, a soil already prepared for new ideas and social change. The ultimate success of the

movement, however, grew out of the concerted efforts of the Chinese government and people. Activists in the movement crossed partisan and gender lines; all labored diligently in the movement until its objectives were achieved. It was also to the advantage of the movement that the Western churches did not formally adopt anti-footbinding as official policy, and the Boxer Protocol did not include a proposed clause prohibiting footbinding. Otherwise, the conservative opposition might have been more successful in claiming foreign intervention in domestic affairs, thus slowing progress toward ultimate success of the movement. Indeed, after the Boxer Protocol was concluded, the anti-footbinding movement gained momentum and the results were impressive.

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